

FUNDABLE KNOWLEDGE
The Marketing of Defense Technology

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Editor's Introduction

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In *Fundable Knowledge: The Marketing of Defense Technology*, A. D. Van Nostrand takes us on a remarkable journey into one of the largest knowledge production systems in history, one that has funded much of the academic and industrial research in the United States over the last half-century. Within the closed world of defense research, directed by government mandates for free competitive bidding, an unusual market has developed. Only those closely involved with this often-secret enterprise have had a detailed sense of how this knowledge market worked.

The market sustains itself on paper: legislation, budget resolutions, guidelines and regulations, announcements of initiatives, white papers, requests for proposals, contracts, reports, capability statements. Documents in these well-ordered genres articulate with one another in systematic regularity, carrying out the business of the negotiation, contracting, and production of knowledge within the constraints of law. Yet they also have provided the flexibility to innovate new technologies, as all parties seek after their notions of the possible and the advantageous.

The systematic interaction of these genres defines what knowledge is, what problems get posed, and what kind of knowledge gets produced. The process converts information and potential information into problem-relevant knowledge; moreover, as Van Nostrand points out, the process results in the competence of providers and purchasers to identify and carry out new

knowledge ventures. Increasing competence is as much part of the knowledge produced by the system as are the specific pieces of information contained in final project reports. The capability statement displays most directly the production of competence. Van Nostrand, among his many accomplishments, draws our attention to the ubiquitous but almost invisible genre of capability statement, important in all the professions.

While the defense knowledge market has supported much of the economy by directing defense production and by providing new ideas for the civilian market, it has been kept alive only by the political desire for national security in military terms. In the post-cold-war world, however, national security is being reinterpreted in economic terms. In order to serve the civilian commercial market, this knowledge production system—built on a close communicative relationship between a small number of vendors in symbiotic relation with a single client, articulated through many agencies and subsections—must find a new way of doing business. Its entire system of genres by which knowledge production is conceived, contracted, and completed must be opened up to the needs and dynamics to which it was not originally designed to be responsive. The current stage of defense conversion, making existing defense knowledge available to commercial users, is only the first step in a much larger process of reordering the communicative patterns by which knowledge is produced.

Defense spending (often to our chagrin and embarrassment) has been one of the great machines driving and feeding funds to the development of science and technology, not just in the last half-century, but throughout history. Can we find a peaceful way to maintain serious research on the same scale without a military motive, driven only by social priorities of prosperity, amity, and social well-being, and by environmental health? Will research serve only the most immediate demands of corporations, aimed at products that can turn a profit in a few years, or can we also fund research inspired by possibilities of the future? The answers to these bold questions are to be found, if we are to follow Van Nostrand's lead, not in bold ideological statements, but in the rhetorical details of the systems by which knowledge is produced. The issue then becomes: Can we develop a highly articulated knowledge market that will produce the kind of knowledge we would want to have and that will produce the kinds of competence that will make our world a better place?

Fundable Knowledge: The Marketing of Defense Technology provides powerful tools for thinking about the relationship of the three themes of this series: rhetoric, knowledge, and society.